

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bon Secour

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit to the American people.



This blue goose, designed by J.N. Ding Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Preserving a Natural Heritage

Established by Congress on June 9, 1980, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge encompasses within its boundaries some of Alabama's last remaining undisturbed coastal barrier habitat.

Located fifty miles due west of Pensacola, Florida, and fifty miles southeast of Mobile, Alabama, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge consists of about 6700 acres of coastal lands ranging from constantly changing beach dunes to rolling pine-oak woodlands. Management at Bon Secour is aimed at protecting and preserving these unique habitats and associated wildlife for generations to come. The refuge protects the well being of native plants and animals, serves as a living laboratory for students and scientists, and provides wildlife-oriented public recreation.

The name Bon Secour comes from the French meaning "safe harbor," very appropriate considering the sanctuary for native flora and fauna that the refuge provides. Bon Secour is indeed a natural oasis of wildlands in a sea of condominiums where wildlife can exist without harm.





Coastal Photography Club

Habitat

By definition, habitat is an area where an animal or plant lives which provides food, water, shelter and space. Bon Secour owns or manages five miles of gulf beaches on the Fort Morgan Peninsula and more than a dozen miles of bayfront on other refuge units along Mobile Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway. Impressively pristine, the beaches along the Fort Morgan peninsula are often referred to as America's Riviera. Coastal Alabama is indeed a paradise not only for humans but for several endangered or threatened species as well.

Endangered or Threatened Species on Bon Secour

Listed as endangered June 6, 1985, the Alabama beach mouse is associated with the sand dunes closest to the Gulf of Mexico which support stands of sea oats, a principal food source for this small dune dweller. A small mouse with a buff colored patch on its back and snowy white underbelly, the Alabama beach mouse is nocturnal in nature, living and breeding in the foredunes, burrowing small tunnels in the sand to escape predators. Its existence has been threatened by man's steady development along the natural beaches where it makes its home.



Alabama Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit

The Alabama Beach Mouse

The Loggerhead Sea Turtle



USFWS

In over 200 million years these creatures have changed very little. The loss of nesting beaches due to coastal development and predation have been major factors in the decline of these huge marine reptiles. In summer, tell-tale tracks on refuge beaches attest to nocturnal visits of loggerheads which come ashore to lay eggs and then return secretively to the sea. Nesting occurs from May—September, peaking around mid-June.

The Piping Plover

Due to direct habitat loss and beach alterations, populations of piping plovers were listed as threatened and endangered in 1986. Piping plovers are small, solitary shorebirds that nest on open sandy beaches along the mid to northern Atlantic coast, the Great Lakes region, and the Northern Great Plains. Plovers from these areas overwinter at Bon Secour feeding on invertebrates along the beaches and tidal flats. During the winter, piping plovers can be recognized by having pale gray feathers and white underparts with pale yellow legs, and a short, black bill.

The American Alligator

Found throughout the refuge, the American Alligator can be confused with the long, pointed-nosed crocodile which in the U.S. is found only in extreme south Florida. The alligator has a more rounded nose.



Coastal Photography Club

Most of Bon Secour's gators measure 6-12 feet, although the record in the U.S. is 19 feet 2 inches. On land, the sleepy looking reptile is able to produce speeds of up to 20 miles per hour. When in the water, they often resemble a log, so look for just its nose, eyes and back above the surface.



Coastal Photography Club



USFWS

Hurricane Frederic

At nightfall on September 12, 1979, the devastating 150 mph winds of Hurricane Frederic struck the Alabama Gulf Coast doing untold damage to property, wildlife and the natural barrier island itself. Miraculously, not a single human life was lost due to this storm. Born off the coast of Africa days earlier, Frederic raged on for twelve hours, twisting and snapping pine trees like toothpicks. Live oaks faired better in strong winds. Summer homes were ripped apart and scattered along the peninsula like leaves in the wind. Such debris is still evident in many places over the refuge today, mute testimony to the impermanence of man's creations in an area subject to the awesome fury of hurricanes.

Things You Can Do

Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge is open year-round during daylight hours for hiking, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, and nature study. Take your binoculars and camera, walk the trails and look closely. This will help you to see animals that blend in well with their surroundings.

Foot trails

The Pine Beach Trail is open seven days a week from dawn to dusk. The trail is four miles round trip. Next to Gator Lake is a kiosk where visitors are welcome to stop for a picnic lunch.



Coastal Photography Club



Coastal Photography Club



Coastal Photography Club

The Jeff Friend Trail is the newest of our trails and features a one mile loop. Spectacular views of the lagoon can be had on this trail.

During the hot, humid, summer months, be prepared for mosquitos, sand gnats and other biting insects; bring along insect repellent.

*Fishing—
fresh water*

Forty-acre Gator Lake is open for fishing year-round. Largemouth bass, catfish, bluegill are the most commonly caught species. Canoe and small boats are allowed as are electric trolling motors—gasoline motors are prohibited. Boats must be portaged 8/10 of a mile from the parking lot at the trail head or one can fish from the bank. A valid Alabama freshwater fishing license is required.

*Fishing—
salt water*

Anglers can take advantage of the beach access to try their hand at surf fishing. Or take a short stroll down the Jeff Friend Trail to fish Little Lagoon. A valid Alabama saltwater fishing license is required.

Hiking

The entire refuge is open to hiking and nature study although travel off the designated trail may require boots or waders.

Prohibited Activities

No weapons allowed.

Collection of artifacts, animals, sea oats, and other plants is prohibited.

Pets must be on a leash at all times.

Please put litter in its place.

Camping and open fires are prohibited on all refuge units.

Vehicles, including ATV's, prohibited off state and county roads.

Wildlife Calendar

Spring/Summer

Migratory songbirds herald spring's arrival, most arriving in mid-April. Birdwatchers from near and far come to view the marvelous array of diverse species.

Wading bird nesting takes two months to complete, usually starting in May but sometimes starting as late as early July. Nearby great blue heron and cattle egret rookeries (nature's nursery) are very active with newborn chicks.

By mid-April, the ospreys arrive back at Bon Secour and immediately set out refurbishing their nests. Watch for aerial courtship displays of these beautiful birds. During the summer, ospreys feed nestlings.



Coastal Photography Club



Jim Allen



Charlie Heidecker

Endangered/threatened sea turtle nesting occurs. The entire process from nest digging to egg hatching takes approximately 60 days beginning in May and lasting through September.

Fall/Winter

Fall bird migration begins in August and peaks around mid-October. During this time peregrines and other raptors can be seen soaring overhead.

Monarch butterfly migration. In mid-October hundreds can be seen along the Pine Beach Trail drawing nutrients from milkweed and other plants.



Coastal Photography Club

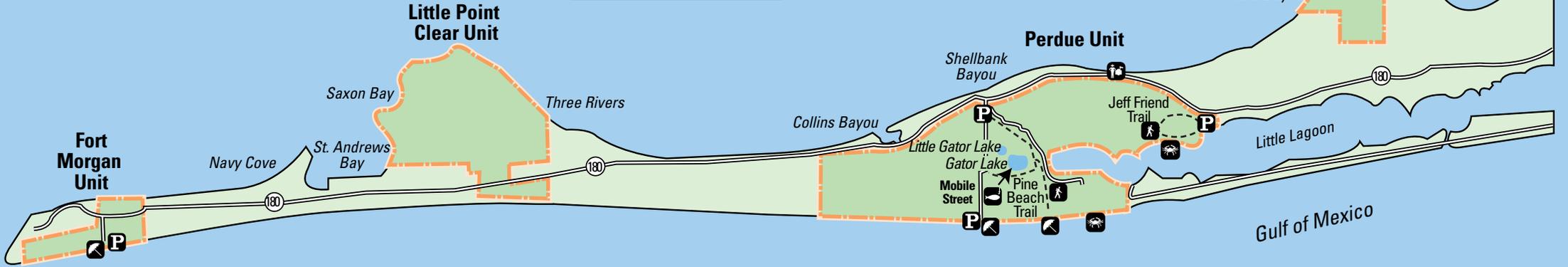
In September and October fall wildflowers light up the peninsula with a spectacular array of colors. Two of the most popular are the scarlet colored red basil and the feathery goldenrod with its sweet anise-like aroma.

In addition to the migrants, brown pelicans, ospreys and a wide variety of wading birds can be seen year-round. Other wildlife you may see are bobcats, squirrels, marsh and cottontail rabbits, opossum, raccoons, and nine-banded armadillos.

Bon Secour

National Wildlife Refuge

-  Refuge boundary
-  Foot trail
-  Fresh water fishing
-  Salt water fishing
-  Public beach access
-  Visitor center
-  Hiking
-  Parking



Coastal Photography Club



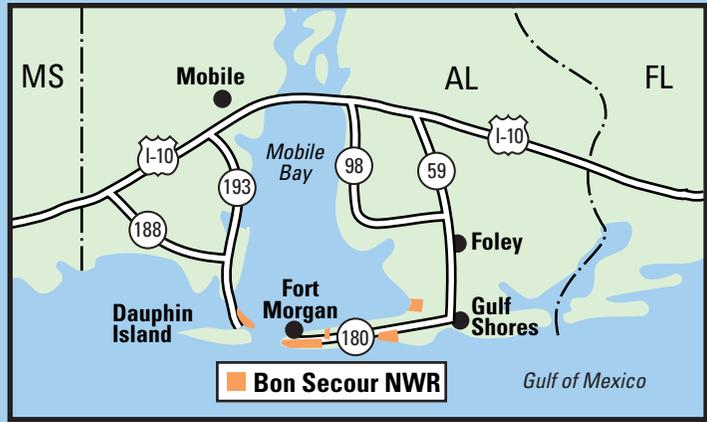
Coastal Photography Club



USFWS



Alabama Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit



Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge
12295 State Highway 180
Gulf Shores, AL 36542
Phone: 251/540 7720
Fax: 251/540 7301

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
<http://www.fws.gov/~r4eao>

June 2001

